TEACHING ENLISH

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EDITORIAL

ENTERPRISES OF PITH AND MOMENT

The main theme of this number of "Teaching English" is the necessity for foreign language work to be purposeful, to be directed to ends which are clear to the pupil, as well as to the teacher or to the education authorities. In this we are continuing the theme of the November number in which several writers showed the importance of content in what is read and learnt in a language course. Obviously no sensible boy or girl can be expected to take seriously a language which presents him with trivialities or stories that he already knows. Similarly language which seems to contain none of the joy or wit of good and lively poetry, none of the pattern and movement of first-class writing, cannot appeal to the emotions and the aesthetic needs of the pupil, nor act as a means of developing a fully rounded personality. Some teachers speak as though literature were not language, but some sort of special use of words that has become separated from language. Others speak as though language can be learnt without speaking or writing about anything; this is to prefer walking round a prison yard fifty times to get exercise, to taking a walk with a friend through the crowded and animated streets of a city or through an interesting country landscape. Of course, the walk round the prison yard demands less of the jailer; what teacher would care to have himself compared to a jailer, but can he compare himself to a friend?

Learning a language must be an important and significant enterprise designed to win for the pupil a more intensive experience and wider view of the world than can be found within the limits of one language. The significance of a foreign language is only evident in its bringing us what eludes translation or is inaccessible in the home language. A foreign language course must give foretastes of this. It is true that the language must also be seen to be a useful tool for everyday use, and for this reason all the oral work, all the language exercises done to produce fluency and readiness in the language should relate to the home background. The pupil's note-book should be a personal text-book embodying his own first-hand experience in the language.

The teacher should also not rely on the pupil's imagination to carry him without any help into a foreign atmosphere and set of values. He must prepare for any sally from the home experience,

into the world outside, by discussing with the class parallel experience, or even contrasting experience or sets of values well-known at home. An experience of the strange must always be built up carefully on familiar and recognized concepts developed on familiar ground; to leave this to the unaided imagination of the pupil is to build on sand.

But learning a foreign language is a controlled exercise in learning to face and deal with what is strange; it is an attempt to prepare the pupil to face what he does not easily understand, what is unfamiliar, without being afraid or bewildered. We do not help him to acquire the right kind of toughness and courage by smoothing the path too flat.

Teaching a foreign language is not equivalent to teaching animals tricks; it is a social enterprise designed to put the pupil in touch with more people and more diverse types of people and their experience than are otherwise within his reach; it is designed to prepare him not to be upset by their apparent strangeness, to know from experience that he can come to understand them, to learn to see them as potential friends, as people to be taken seriously and valued for the advice and help they can give him. Language is an activity, a part of human life, a way of behaving, not merely a set of cyphers to be recognized and decoded or tricks to be mastered. We degrade language and render it ineffective to move the mind if we divorce it from its content or its significance as a social bond. Learning a foreign language must, therefore, be an attempt to search in strange countries for significant slices of life and experience of the world; if it is not this, the search brings in nothing of value, the pupil will soon become listless in the struggle and will give it up altogether as soon as the teacher's eye is off him.

To quote from the inspiring lecture reviewed on another page by Mr. K. G. Saiyidain, Educational Adviser to the Government of India, New Delhi—

"What is the highest objective of great literature? It is to awaken a sense of human kinship, to set our heart-strings stirring to the music of man's achievements and sorrows, to cut across the prejudices of race and caste and creed and colour and sex. To achieve this end, we have to refine the taste and train the appreciation of our students and this can only be done if they learn to live with books — with good books and great books."

IMPRESSIONS OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN INDIAN SCHOOLS TODAY

By Miss A. L. Jackson M.A.

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A sickness has come over the study of English in the High Schools in South India, of which the worst symptom is that pupils cannot understand even the simplest English question put to them by strangers, who do not know Tamil. How quickly they have lost the old self-confidence and willingness to try to say it in English that was characteristic when I was teaching in a high school in Madras during the years 1940-5.

When I left India at the end of the war the change-over to the mother-tongue medium of instruction was in my school complete up to the fifth form. I therefore had Form V pupils who had not had English medium instruction at all. They had however this advantage over present-day pupils, they had studied English as a second language from Class I. These pupils could for all practical purposes communicate with me in English.

Teaching English as I did during the transition period, I naturally pondered over the change coming over the nature of our task. I realised that the difficulties of adjustment, for teachers who knew nothing of methods of teaching a foreign language, were enormous. I myself had in an amateur way experimented with sentence patterns, making up my own as I went along. I had also recognised that the age of reasoning does not begin till after thirteen and that therefore it is waste of time to teach more than a few simple grammar terms before that age. In those days the education department, not the teachers, were insisting on formal grammar, as a reaction from the failures of the previous fashion, "the direct method". There was a good deal of stress on parsing and clause analysis in S.S.L.C. papers. However, enlightened teachers were, except in Forms V and VI teaching grammar not as a subject in itself but as an aid to the self-correction of composition. But our chief need was something then *non-existent*, good training for teachers in the method of teaching English as a foreign language.

While in England, though this was not my main work, I always had some foreign students to whom I was teaching English. Through the British Council paper, *English Language Teaching*, I was able to watch the rapid development of method, and from

Madras I received, in due course, the 1952 syllabus and a set of readers to go with it. Now I have returned to India on a prolonged visit and have been able through the Extension Department of St. Christopher's Training College to get again into contact with English teaching in the schools. I am not a pedagogical specialist. My approach is that of the class-room teacher who tests new methods by whether they suit the pupils. I fully appreciate, because I have had to teach without them, the value in the early stages of a controlled vocabulary and graded structures.

As soon as I went back to the schools I found pessimism and defeatism among the teachers, who seemed overwhelmed with the difficulties of this task. I therefore set myself through talks with teachers and through teaching classes where possible to find out something of what is wrong. I have not had enough time to make a complete investigation but others will I hope step in where I have only begun.

I asked to do demonstration lessons on a correlation of composition and conversation in Form III. I was told immediately that the pupils would not understand my English accent. But I have proved in every lesson I have taken so far that this is not true. What they do not understand is the English way of speaking, and our use of words and phrases. There is a "South Indian English", and because I have lived long in the Tamil Nad and also understand Tamil sentence-patterns I can so mould my phrases that I can quickly establish communcation, and once communication is established, it increases by constant and friendly practice. When Dr. Mendonhall of the All-India Council of Secondary Education visited Form III which I had taught for some weeks, he was able to establish communication and tell them about his daughters. His accent of course is different from mine but he is a skilled language teacher and I had told him what the Form and I had been talking about. I am convinced that in the early stages language should be taught chiefly for communication and therefore there should be plenty of free conversation. The teacher being familiar with the sentence-patterns already taught will guide conversation within them but will not be worried if an intelligent pupil goes outside them. The conversation must be interesting and vital to the class, suited to their psychological age.

I took a course of eight or nine lessons in Form III, the weekly composition lesson. We took as our theme "June, an English girl of 12". The lessons were given in December, so we talked about June's school and home in that cold dark month. After four lessons I produced a letter from June written in simple English. They read her letter easily and were delighted to write

a reply. Then came the inevitable question "can we post the letter?" to June's imaginary address! So I got a headmistress friend at home to send me the names of twelve real twelve-year olds. We wrote letters to them dividing into twelve groups to do it. Last week the replies came and I took them to the Form. To my surprise the children had no difficulty at all in reading the replies. The only difficulty was the place-names. For the English twelve-year olds writing in their mother tongue used the simple sentence-patterns that I had taught the Tamil pupils in writing their letters. Girls of twelve even when writing in the mother tongue do not use difficult language or structures.

From this experiment tried out in two schools, I would make the following suggestions:

(*i*) Some of the structures in the syllabus are not suitable to the psychological age of Form III. Let them practise and use in free conversation those patterns that are normal to their age, especially conversation and narrative English, with simple sequence of tense — present or past — "I am twelve years old." "I am studying English, mathematics and history." "I like dancing." "I want a new bicycle."

(*ii*) There is plenty of time for conversation in the composition lesson. Here is a skeleton outline of my first lesson on June.

(a) Conversation with the class about what clothes they wear and what food they eat and what clothes June wears and what food she eats in December. 15 minutes.

(b) The class suggests six sentences on June for composition. These sentences are put on the board and practised. 12 minutes.

(c) Writing of the composition. 12 minutes.

One of my terms of reference, given me by a headmistress, was how can we make corrections lighter? If only six to ten sentences are written and careful oral practice is done, if pupils are encouraged to ask for correct spelling—there need be very few corrections.

My marking on the letter to June was — Good 15: Medium 20: Poor 2: Zero nil. It is still not sufficiently recognised by school authorities that long compositions at this stage are detrimental to good language work, and that educational psychologists are agreed today that heavy corrections by the teacher do not help the pupil.

But the main conviction that I want to express is, that given vital interest and regular practice, we can get third formers to enjoy communication through English.

I have not had such close contact with high school classes because teachers are so concerned with the amount to be taught that they do not very willingly allow a stranger to experiment,

but I have had many talks with teachers and headmistresses and here may I put on record my great admiration for the patience and skill of these language teachers who handle so successfully classes of 45. To these teachers I would like to make one suggestion which arises from my observation and my reading of an article in *English Language Teaching*, April-June 1956. "A Discussion of Remedial Teaching and an Account of Some Attempts at It" by Mr. D. Y. Morgan. This article came home to me because for five weeks I have had twice weekly a remedial class for 12 below-standard Sixth Form girls, and have been pondering deeply over their language problems. In that paper Mr. Morgan who teaches students in Burma, suggests that language teaching falls into three categories:

1. the presentation of new material.
2. the practice of known material.
3. remedial work.

Now it seems to me that in our English classes we are paying far too little attention to the practice of known material. "We have not time," say my teacher friends, "we have two or three new structures a lesson and all the text-work." Listen to Mr. Morgan "the danger is that the teacher will regard it as his main task to present the new structures and vocabulary . . . *and shut his eyes to much that has gone wrong with his pupil's handling of earlier material,* therefore his pupils are steadily strengthening uncorrected bad habits in their use of the more elementary and fundamental parts of the language."

The language inability of the Sixth Form girls I have had in this remedial class can be summed up in the above words. They were unable to make even the simplest sentence patterns with correct verb forms. They could not write correctly the sentence structures of the First and Second Forms, worse still they had acquired the guessing habit so badly that the only cure would be a much longer period of remedial work. I found drill of the patterns was useless and the most successful teaching aid for them proved to be a simple aid to the working out of some tense patterns which I prepared for them giving each a copy and with the help of which they began to correct themselves.

Practice of known material and remedial work ought, I am sure, to have a much larger place in the English teacher's scheme of work and here one must respectfully suggest using Mr. Morgan's words again "that our rigid year by year syllabuses are likely to foster neglect of remedial teaching and practice of known material." If I am right in thinking that it is being neglected I know it is due to the pressure of the number of structures to be taught.

But more than all I am distressed along with many others at

the failure of the pupils in Form VI to write a paragraph of simple English. I personally am a great advocate of what I call "and, but, and when" English—the language of the narratives of Jacob and Joseph in Genesis, in the Authorised Version of the Bible the language of our common speech, the language of our story-telling to children, and I suggest we should take these sentence patterns as basic in the Middle School, to be recalled continually in the High School and used in narrative, description, and statement of fact in all classes. Surely we can teach our pupils to write this plain English. In spite of Mr. Hornby's delightful English by radio conversations to which as a teacher I owe an enormous debt of gratitude, David and Mary do not talk in structures once they leave the studio, and English as communication is not greatly advanced by filling up blanks, or practising a string of conditional sentences.

This also has its bearing on non-detailed Readers. All teachers complain that the non-detailed Readers are just an added burden because the pupils cannot read them alone. I have recently written a short story in simple English for my adult education English class of peons and college servants. It is Conan Doyle's story of the beggar who made a fortune, simplified and Indianised. It is written in simple English narrative style.

I had seen a certain Fourth Form struggling with their non-detailed Reader helped by the teacher. So I took this story to that Form, gave each girl a copy and then said to them "I want you to read this without help. If there is any word you do not understand hold up your hand. I am going to time you to see how long you take to read the story."

No one put up her hand. After $8\frac{1}{2}$ minutes $^2/_3$ of the class had read the story, and when, I asked the leading comprehension question, Who is the beggar? I got a shout from the class of the right answer. From subsequent question I found they had understood the story well. They showed they could read straightforward narrative in English.

When I went to report results to the headmistress I found that she too had had a similar bright idea and had been reading to them with success from *Reading for Comprehension*, Book II, by Edgar C. Hay Ellis. I must therefore try my story in another school where the pupils have not been so well prepared.

We should rejoice in the fact that English is the language *par excellence* for story-telling. Let us tell our pupils stories and get them to write stories and read them, but the stories we tell must be interesting to them, and in the early stages short stories are best.

I also want to advocate much more independent work. We

must tackle seriously this problem of getting our pupils to read for themselves. Some Forms in high schools are bored almost to rebellion with the continual practice of structures. Individual reading is another way of learning English usage, some think an equally effective way.

The South Indian has a reputation throughout the world for being a good linguist. From my contact with children in the schools this year I do not see any fundamental change in their language ability. The boys and girls of today are making the language mistakes their parents made when I was teaching. What is needed now is experiment in the class-room. Let the teacher take over from the specialist and try out various methods. Let the specialist be prepared to modify syllabuses in the light of class-room experiment. Above all let us not neglect the psychological factor of interest. If our pupils are bored they will not learn well; if they are discouraged they will not learn at all.

CO-OPERATION IN LEARNING

BY R. S. JAMES,

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MR. F. L. BILLOWS of the British Council, Madras, has lectured and written extensively on this and the other aspects of language learning. This article is the practical side of this subject, describing the collective experience of the group-techniques tried by teachers in several Secondary Schools in Hyderabad and Secunderabad.

Education in our country has grown far beyond its capacity to educate. The average strength of a class in an average class-room is about fifty students. For some time, both as the Headmaster of an over-crowded high school in the city and later as the Co-ordinator of the Extension Services in this area, I have been feeling that though it is desirable to reduce the number of pupils in a class, it is much more realistic to deal with the problem as it is. For unless the country becomes rich over-night the problem of large classes will remain with us for many years to come. Besides, there is also the problem of the backward children. With the numbers in the classes swelling to unmanageable proportions, the cause of the backward child is hopelessly lost. Either the teacher is content to take along with him those few who can follow him or makes a little more effort which would at best reach the average child. It is almost impossible for the teacher to pay any attention to the backward children.

When in June 1957, Mr. Billows conducted a course for English teachers in Hyderabad, I was in charge of the course and helped him. As I had been teaching English for years—eighteen years—I made it a point not to miss his lectures. Then one morning he talked about Co-operation in Language Learning—how language is born of the social and co-operative life of the first community, and it is the most natural way to learn in social groups. In fact, all learning is a co-operative effort.

My work as the Co-ordinator of the Extension Services, takes me to many schools. I talked to the teachers, emphasising this particular aspect of learning. Group-technique in the learning process offered the answer for our problems of over-large classes and the backward pupils. In schools we have been emphasising unhealthy individual competition among pupils, ignoring the natural advantages of co-operation. Again, group-work gives opportunities for sharing and co-operative work rather than competing with one another. It can also be used for strengthening the weak links in teaching. When a lesson is taught, many points are not properly grasped. During the period of practice in groups, these points and the general principles involved are understood better.

Examples of Group-Technique in Learning

(i) Language : In language learning, the groups can dramatise certain portions, hold conversations and discussions; prepare teaching aids such as sand-tables, flannel graphs, charts, models, etc. which are used in the teaching of a particular lesson. The dramatised portions, and those that lend themselves to conversations and dialogues, could be written by groups at the end of the group activities. The groups draw, paint, cut and use the pictures to illustrate the lesson. Composition: In a class, if a composition is written by individual pupils, the teacher has neither the time nor the energy to look through the fifty composition books and correct them. But if the class works in five or six groups, there are many advantages. Firstly, many mistakes which otherwise are inevitably made by individual pupils are avoided; because mistakes are corrected immediately they occur even at the stage of discussion. Someone in the group is bound to know the correct structure or the spelling. If no one in the group knows, there is the teacher who is at hand and free for ready reference. So just as in the case of health the golden rule of "prevention is better than cure" is in operation. Secondly, composition is richer in ideas, as the ideas gathered by many individual pupils are pooled, selected and arranged before writing. Thirdly, the teacher has to correct only five or six books, instead

of the fifty composition exercises, and that, too, immediately and more thoroughly, so that what is written is immediately corrected and turned over to the group which discusses the mistakes and rewrites the whole composition, and all the members of the group copy the correct version. Besides, the group composition is of a higher standard both in the matter of ideas, their arrangement and in the correctness of expression. If "two heads are better than one" then eight to ten heads should be superior to two. A class of VII Std. boys, working in groups, produced and broadcast a one-act play on *Robin Hood* over the A.I.R. Hyderabad.

(ii) Mathematics : Generally the mathematics teacher does a model sum or problem on the blackboard, and then at the end asks the class if there is anyone who did not understand it. Of course no one owns up as it would naturally belittle him in the eyes of his peers. So the teacher, well-satisfied, tells the class to do the first ten sums from the text-book and show him. The one that has understood the sum well, will not only do ten but a hundred. The one that does not, sits back or tries to look into some other's work. He is dubbed either lazy or a cheat. What else can we expect from one who does not know? But if, instead, the teacher divided the class into groups, and each group is asked to do one sum or problem, then the steps that have not been understood by some in the group are made clear by others. Each group can do several sums or problems till *every one* in each group has thoroughly understood the principle involved and is ready to take up individual work. This method certainly helps the weaker children, who otherwise become the problem of the teacher.

(iii) History, Geography and Social Studies: Here again the groups can take up assignments from the lessons and do them. They collect other material outside the text-book, make charts, maps and models (period costumes, dams, canals, etc.) and what is more, present their assignment to the rest of the class. This group-method not only gives opportunities to the pupils to *learn by doing,* but also makes them refer to *books* and *persons.* They also feel that they are important because they have an opportunity to present the lesson to the class. The lesson so presented is discussed by the whole class. Points are raised by the class and are answered by the members of the group, and the final approved version is copied by the whole class. The illustrative material can go up on the class notice-board. This again has several advantages. Each pupil in the group *does* something to contribute to the lesson. Those that do not possess verbal facility are busy making charts, etc. For once in their student-life, they are on the "right side", presenting the lesson

to the class rather than sitting on the "wrong side" and listening passively. It certainly boosts up their morale and they feel they are important. I asked a class of girls (English medium) and another class of boys (Telugu medium), who were following this group-technique in social studies, how this method of learning was different from the traditional method. Their answers given below are identical:

(a) "We are independent of the teacher; and become self-reliant." In fact, in one case, the teacher went away on a twenty-day leave, and the groups worked *without* a substitute teacher and completed their assignments by the time she returned, ready for presentation to the class.

(b) "We know now that the text-book is not the be-all and end-all. There are other sources such as books and persons from which we can get extra and more useful and interesting information." One of the girls of a group who took up *River-Valley Civilisations* brought a passage from an old Shepherd's Grammar on the Babylonian civilisation. Others brought pictures and articles from the magazines and periodicals such as, *Life, The Illustrated Weekly of India, The Illustrated London News,* etc.

(c) "What we learn we cannot forget easily, because we are not passively listening, but *actively learning.*" *The emphasis is shifted from teaching to learning.*

The teachers told us that though it involved considerable effort in planning the assignments, their effort ended there. Later they were there only to help here and there and in many cases learn. They also said that where groups started working on such small projects in lessons, they had altogether forgotten that there is a problem like discipline. The teacher supplied the motivation and drive, and the pupils worked and did everything after that. More than anything else, this method develops the *critical attitude,* which is one of the main functions of education in a democratic country, better than any other known method. For, here the class is critical of what one group has to say, and questions its authenticity and asks for proofs. Whereas if the same facts are presented by the teacher, they are accepted as sacred truths.

(iv) Science : In this subject, each group takes up an experiment. While two members of the group (the most backward) actually carry out the experiment two others read out the observations and another two are recording them. Later the whole experiment is presented to the class.

(v) Co-curricular activities : The group-technique contributes a great deal to the enhancement of co-curricular activities in a school. The themes for the school shows in drama, dance, and

music could come from the language lessons on which the groups have been working. The debating society could take up some of the problems from history, geography, social studies, etc. for discussions. The Current Events Club can deal with the latest problems from the Social Studies. The Art and Craft Clubs could work on audio-visual material and other teaching aids to illustrate the lessons. The "Class-room Beautiful" Project could use all these charts, maps, models, etc. and use the talent from the Art Club to paint, and decorate the class-room with appropriate paintings and pictures.

In all group-work the activity method is dominant. Learning by doing is the key-note. Again it has been noticed that children tend to learn better from one another than from the teacher: They are less shy and more ready to ask what they do not understand, as there is no interruption to the whole class, nor is there the superior "so you did not understand that" from the teacher. Group activities offer innumerable opportunities to children to learn the art of living and to find adjustment with one another and also attain happiness through achievement, and recognition by society. After all, real education is to train pupils to take their rightful place in society successfully. The traditional method does very little to give this practical training in living with others. In group work the personality of the child develops and is enriched in a social atmosphere and is in constant interaction with other personalities. In a vaccuum it withers away.

Some of the difficulties that must however be borne in mind are these. Time and again teachers have said that the group technique is effective and easy on the teacher but it is slow, and the portions in the set syllabus cannot be covered. But this difficulty is overcome by taking up from the syllabus the most important portions and working these out in groups as assignments. The unimportant portions can be covered through the usual lecture-method to show the continuity that runs through all the important portions, thus making it a whole. In a battle the whole army does not march and attack the enemy: it rather selects certain vulnerable points in various places, and attacks them, and deals with the enemy in smaller portions. In history, for example, the different aspects, such as political history, social life and reform, administration, revenue, and the cultural and literary developments in a particular period, such as the Moghal period can be studied by different groups. The introductory lecture, before the assignments are given to the groups, could show the whole picture of the Moghal empire, and the concluding talk can re-emphasise this unity of all the projects.

Again, there is a tendency, the teachers said, for the bright

child who is the leader to do all the work. This difficulty is surmounted if the teacher first of all trains 6 or 8 bright pupils (through the group-technique, he himself assuming the leadership of the groups) to be leaders and instils in them how to get the group to work as a whole, (by demonstration) and then he watches the groups at work and sees that *every member of the group is taking an active part*, making his valuable contribution to the group effort.

ON BETTER TEXT-BOOKS

BY C. P. K. THARAGAN, M.A., L.T.

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WHEN Ruskin talked of all books being classifiable as "books of the hour" and "books of all time" he surely could not have thought of text-books which are neither the one nor the other. The text-book industry which is a highly organised and lucrative side-line of education today, was of course in Ruskin's time still in the womb of futurity. Otherwise how could it have been left out of the famous list of books which are not books—*biblia a biblia*—compiled by Charles Lamb!

"In this catalogue I reckon Court Calendars, Directories, Pocket Books, Draught Boards, bound and lettered on the back, Scientific Treatises, Almanacs, Statutes at Large: the works of Hume, Gibbon, Robertson, Beattie, Soame Jenyns, and generally, all those volumes which 'no gentleman's library should be without:' the Histories of Flavius Josephus (that learned Jew), and Paley's 'Moral Philosophy'—Essays of Elia."

In the pre-text book era, the text out of which you taught and learned a language was usually chosen from among the great literary masterpieces readily available and most suitable for the purpose. Text-books were not made to order. After a little preliminary skirmish with Latin or Sanskrit Grammar and vocabulary, the student advanced boldly to grapple in earnest with Caesar or Tacitus, Raghuvamsa or Kadambari, proceeding in due course to the conquest of Horace, Ovid and Virgil or Kumarasambhava or Sakuntala as the case might be. The student's perception and memory, his powers of inductive and deductive thinking and above all his imagination were exercised to the utmost. No doubt the demands made on his attention and energies were exacting; but the intelligent, the imaginative and the linguistically gifted found it also exhilarating to embark as it were in an outlandish, curiously rigged, magically expanding vessel on

a glorious adventure "through strange seas of thought, alone."

In our modern attempt at the mass production of language-scholars, we can't afford to count upon their innate capacity for language learning. In this age of democracy and the common man, we have come to swear by the "Psychology of behavious", perhaps because the most difficult problem for the common man is how to behave himself! We consider knowledge of a language as less important than being able to behave as if one knew it. The inculcation of automatic language habits through drill methods and the graded teaching of structures and selected vocabulary have taken the place of the discredited grammar-cum-translation method. Pre-fabricated text-books are an integral part of the new system of teaching. Instead of making use of language—its words and sentence patterns—to express worthwhile ideas and feelings, they dish up some kind of insipid mess of miscellaneous odds and ends for the sake of vocabulary and structure. Hence the phenomenal progress of the text-book industry in recent times which has failed to keep pace with the progress in teaching and learning the language.

Granting for the sake of argument that language comes before literature, I maintain that language will not come by making a fetish of the structural approach and the selection and grading of vocabulary. It is a little doubtful whether the human mind can swallow a language in the same way as a boa-constrictor is apt to swallow its prey, taking it in by the thin end and tucking it away by slow and painful degrees. Language-learning is more like a process of growth and assimilation, a reacting forward by fits and starts, flashes of intuition, spurts of energy crowned with achievement. In our excessive preoccupation with structure and vocabulary we ignore the claims of interest and the fact that the text-book must be genuinely readable before it can be read with any profit.

Propaganda for the Five-Year Plans of India, information concerning the great developmental work going on all over the country, biographical studies of India's great men are no doubt highly necessary and useful "nation-building material"—whether equally necessary in the didactic sense is a different matter—but the most fitting and powerful medium for their proper expression is the mother tongue, not the foreign language. Well-known stories from Indian history, myth and fable, thoroughly familiar to the pupils through their rich and varied expression in vernacular prose and poetry do not gain anything by being dressed up in a foreign language just for the purpose of displaying its sentence-patterns and vocabulary. Then there is the mass of dullness and dryness disseminated in the name of informative material—tedious

accounts of how the blood circulates in the body or the food gets digested, how the Co-operative movement is organized or malaria and the hook-worm disease can be controlled. It is true the time available today for teaching English in our schools is much more limited than it used to be. It is also true that English is no longer used for teaching any other school subject. But these are reasons for prescribing more intrinsically interesting reading matter so that as early as possible pupils may come to love the language for what it can give them before they are old and wise enough to love it for its own sake.

The banyan tree and the temple-tank, the washerman's donkey and the water buffalo wallowing in the mud of the shallow stream that flows through the village are perhaps inevitable as starting points for making the acquaintance of the language by meeting it on familiar ground. But the language is after all a foreigner and is at its best on its own ground. Besides, our pupils are not interested in the endless application of the foreign language to interpret what is thoroughly well known to them already—their native and familiar environment. They are usually much more impatient with the deadly monotony and boredom of the familiar and the commonplace than are grown-ups and have a craving and a craze for fresh experiences and new worlds into which they may escape in fact or at least in fancy. Here is an unfailing source of incentive and motive power for all kinds of advanced work in language teaching, and a sure foundation on which to base the selection of text-books for teaching language. Books like *Sandford and Merton, The Swiss Family Robinson, The Children of the New Forest* that describe and depict the English way of life in its natural background of English geography and history are not only likely to display the capacities of English vocabulary and structure to the best advantage but also to make a more powerful appeal to the curiosity and desire for interesting knowledge innate in the minds of all children. The foreign language in association with its appropriate background and atmosphere is a far more stimulating mental experience than familier themes discussed in the foreign language with "fell didactic intent".

Our present tendency to maintain an artificial and untenable distinction between language and literature leads us most unfortunately to keep the latter out of the class-room as long as possible instead of enlisting its support as soon as we can for the total conquest of language.

There are some people who regard the teacher's role as of paramount and that of books as of secondary importance throughout the school course. It has been finely said that "The teacher must embody the living language while the text-book is only the

record and memory-aid of the pupils' class-room experiences in dealing with the living language." However, the most resourceful and gifted teacher of language will need from time to time the help and support of a text-book if only to show him the way he is going and to facilitate progress. An uninspired and uninspiring text-book becomes a drag on good teaching, making the teacher's task doubly difficult. Conversely if the text contains sensible matter interestingly and sensibly handled in good language by those who are first-rate masters of language, his efforts to embody the living language succeed for once in reaping their full and final reward. Time was when we were chary of prescribing a really good book as a "text" for fear that the atmosphere of the class-room might kill the classic; but today we deliberately kill it—eviscerating and emasculating it—before prescribing it for class-room study. We shall have better text-books when we recognise that they must be books before we make them text-books. Let commonsense prevail against the pedantic arguments and preposterous conclusions of linguistic pedagogy.

A COLLECTION OF PUPILS' COMPOSITIONS

BY D. HORSBURGH, B.A. (HON) Lond.

INTRODUCTION

THIS is a selection of essays written by children in an English class where the average age is 14. The subjects were chosen by the children themselves without suggestion by the teacher: they were asked to write about some emotion or experience which had touched them deeply, and these are the results.

A few background notes are necessary. The school is co-educational and residential, situated in the country about a hundred miles from the nearest large town. The medium of instruction is English, but the mother tongue is not; the selections given are by children who speak Tamil, Marathi, Konkani and Hindi. The school is a small one, and so a fairly close personal relationship exists between the children and members of the staff.

On the whole the English teaching is not very systematic. Great attention is paid to handwriting, and the majority of the children read a great deal, as can be seen from their work. We read a great many plays (last year we read six plays of Shakespeare, and the children put on a full production of *Julius Caesar* unaided by members of the staff, including making all the costumes and props. They also read and copy out poetry that pleases them; and of course they all read voraciously out of class. They do little

or no formal grammar; in fact the only exercises of this kind that they ever touch are from Ridout's "English Today". I should add that these selections are printed as written, without corrections of any kind; and that they were written during a supervised class period.

AFTER GAMES

Netball's just over, all girls are tired, happy, some sweating, angry and moody. All moods you can think of are seen among the girls just after Netball. Then I among that crowd came striding home. Our side has won the game and I am happy about it. Next comes my friend in my direction shouting, "(of course she was in my party) You know, I didnt like the way the refree dropped out one goal! I say to myself Oh! Bosh! These fights. Then loudly "Yes, I completely agree with you. It doesn't stop there, it yet continues. My God! How that side cheats". I digest that bit and then say. "I think you are right", and then rushing away saying". But do excuse me as I have to go and take a bath". Then I feel safe as I come to the house door, then into the common room and then on to the Divan. I take a book, but instead of reading it my mind is with netball. Oh! Imagine a goal. Then the centre making a rush for it like a bull and giving the shooter a punch in the solar plexus and next minute I find the second shooter—"Oh!—what did you say". For standing next to me is a girl saying "Go for your bath". Then I shout out in a rage. "I say shut up!" Then coming back to my senses "Oh! a bath, eh! I don't think I'll have it now cause I had it in the morning and now please leave will you?" And then I think about going to prep. Then I say "Oh! I dont think I'll go as there's nothing to do". Then I get an idea! I catch hold of any girl and ask her to play carrom, my favourite indoor game.

And there I end up my ideas, as I have to concentrate on the game.

The wind is whistling, the night is dark,
There not a light, no not a spark.
Then I hear a distant howl,
Perhaps it's. . . . no it's not an owl.
In front of me a streak of white,
Twisting and turning into a wonderous sight.
Then suddenly something swished past my ear,
Which made me cringe and cover with fear.
I was just about deciding what to do,
When a Nightingale chirped a sweet tu-wit-tu-wu
Then to myself, I softly said,
Why do people, at this time, go to bed?

Tragedy

There was a feeling of life everywhere. The sun was shining with life, the breeze was skipping along and inviting us to make use of it and everything else was happy. I took my chance and made use of the invitation of the breeze. I decided to fly my new kite. I came out on the field, doubtful of my success with a kite. The reel of 500 yds of cotton clutched between my nervous fingers. Maya came along and seeing my nervousness offered to start flying my kite.

The kite rose, the reel unwound and my joy knew no limits. The hills smiled at seeing joy for a mere kite. I took over the thread of the kite. Oh how the kite galloped on through the forest of air and dust and bright sunshine. It grew smaller every moment and I thought that my kite must have gone beyond the 200 miles of the air region. I glanced down at the reel, there still was thread enough to go round the globe. Oh those happy moments never to come back. I was only watching the kite and knew not when the thread would finish. When zrrr through my fingers ran the last bit of thread like the string of life and the kite was out of my reach, for by now it was 500 yds away. We ran after it, but in vain. The kite by now was away from the reach of my fond hands. We could only see the red speck with its yellow tail in the blue sky. Oh! Who would know what it feels like when your soul flies away with the kite? We lost it sometimes and sometimes it came back to our sight. At last it gave me a sign of its never coming back, it turned three times and then with a swish of its yellow tail it disappeared into the cruel mysterious blue. If the kite is restored it will be like placing a heart in a body.

The Moonrise Yesterday

The dreary clouds floated on dreamily, grey, full and bulky. The evenings rays of the setting sun pierced through, red, slanting, all resting on the hills surrounding, tired and vermillony magnificent. The darkening distance swam in amethyst. The trees drooped sadly and sighed, as the gentle evening gust, mused in their midst. The birds winged for their nests. The brown and russet leaves rustled in the gloomy undergrowth. The sun dipped into the inky west. The running water flowed on its own sweet will. The lowing herd glide away to their shed. The landscape dims and retires after having a royal day. The calm of the night settles on. The landscape is hidden and captured in the misty blue. All is dark wonderful, cool, calm, and glistening. The grumpy clouds in their bosom preserve the undisturbed night.

All is quiet. But far off in the east there is a slow and pure brown glow. It rises like the oncoming tide. The moon appears excellently sweet, brown, red, yellow, silent, royal and watchful.

FIRST LOVE

Love is a word that has no definite meaning. I once read that love was nothing but desire. But I think that love is a unexplainable feeling that comes from deep inside you. It makes the person in question to stand out promenently. Every time you notice her eyes turned in your direction you feel a thrill pass through you. Every time you look at her you feel a sort of bond drawing you towards her. Her little actions, movement and speeches mean a lot to you. You are annoyed yet you feel no anger if she does anything offensive to you. Your first love is one of the most beautiful, annoying and memorable instances of a young boy's life.

WHERE WE CAME IN[1]

BY PETER QUINCE

(In this article Peter Quince discusses the way in which teaching methods tend to oscillate between concentrating upon the techniques of a subject and concentrating upon the purpose for which the subject is learned).

CHALK, TALK AND TODAY

The other day I came across a modern "word-controlled" Reader. It seemed to me to be excellent, and I have no doubt that it is a powerful weapon in the fight against illiteracy. Yet as I read through the ingenious permutations of the handful of common words from which it was composed, I could not help feeling that this was where I came in. As I read through "I have a dog. Have I a dog? Yes, I have a dog. Jim has a dog. Has Jim a dog? Yes, Jim has a dog. Jim and I have a dog. Have Jim and I. . . ." a strange feeling of nostalgia came over me. Once again I could smell the damp cloakroom where my first contact with the educational system was made. Once again I could see the crowded class-room and the sandtrays, and the bucket where the modelling clay was kept to soak. None of your Beacons, or your Janet and John's have been able to do that for me.

For I myself learned to read from a two-letter primer, which was a remarkable literary production composed entirely of two-

[1] From *The Schoolmaster*, 24 January 1958. By kind permission of the Editor of *The Schoolmaster*.

letter words. The chief character was an ox, who figured in a series of mysterious statements such as "It is on an ox" and "I am on an ox" and "An ox is up." The author had been hard put to it to keep himself within the peculiar limitations of his art, but with incredible ingenuity he had managed it for quite a number of pages.

Looking back to those days, I sometimes wonder how many five-year-olds who went through this routine with me ultimately turned into non-readers simply because they found the whole business of reading so pointless that it was not worth bothering about. And even among those who mastered the drill, I sometimes wonder how many turned into the type of well-educated man who never buys a book for himself, and who never has a book in his own home.

The teacher of skills is always in a cleft stick. He has to deal in techniques and in ultimate aims. If he concentrates upon ultimate aims and sets a task which makes clear in the child's mind the purpose for which the technique is being learned, then the actual skill required is usually beyond the child's grasp, and the task ends in failure. But if he concentrates upon technique, and splits the skill up into component parts which can be practised one by one until some real ability has been achieved, then the child loses sight of the purpose for which the technique is being learned, and the whole business becomes pointless and too tedious to be worth bothering about. The good teacher tries to steer his way between the two, but only a genius can do it really successfully. It requires a Chopin to write a study which is also a musical masterpiece.

But there are fashions in education, and fashion tends to swing regularly from technique to purpose and back again. Forty years ago education fashion concentrated upon techniques. Whatever was to be learned was split up into component parts, and each part was practised until it was learned. When we learned to read we used the phonic method, and ploughed our way through our two-letter primer until we completely forgot that people read for enjoyment, or for spiritual uplift, or to obtain information. When we did arithmetic, we multiplied and divided seven-figure monstrosities by each other until we forgot that arithmetic deals with real things and produces answers for practical people to use. When we learned the piano, we pounded away at our scales and at Czerny's 101, until we forgot that music was the stuff which David used to calm Saul, which roused the volunteers from Marseilles to storm into Paris, and which enabled Handel to give us a glimpse of our salvation. We learned history as a list of dates, and geography as a list of rivers, capes and islands. I still remem-

ber the woollen towns of Yorkshire as a rhythmical list. Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield and Dewsbury it went.

Naturally the reaction set in. Reading capitulated to the sentence-method, which put meaning into the centre of the picture, and let spelling and sound and word-building go hang. In arithmetic we weighed sand, kept shops, and measured the playground until the careful and accurate manipulation of figures became something almost to be ashamed of. We chirruped away at the great masters from the word "go," and consigned scales and Czerny to the waste-paper basket. We made models of native villages and South Sea Islands, and let Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield and Dewsbury become nothing more than the names of football teams.

It looks now as though in the very necessary reform we have sometimes emptied the baby out with the bath. There are signs that we have gone too far in concentrating upon purpose rather than upon technique. The appearance of the word-controlled reader and the return of the phonic method to respectability are indications that the analysis of reading techniques still has its place in learning to read. There is growing emphasis upon examinations, and upon knowledge which can be tested. The more eccentric manifestations of free activity are being shed, and factual knowledge is coming back into its rightful place.

The cynic will say that this is merely the swing of the pendulum, "If I continue to do what I am doing now" he will complacently remark, as he puts his feet up on the radiator. "I will sooner or later be in the forefront of fashion." The educational expert, especially if he is an expert of long standing, will regard the present tendency as reactionary, for there is no one who finds it so difficult to go back on a theory which has once been accepted as the expert who made his reputation on it.

But the ordinary conscientious teacher in the schools will continue, a little unsteadily perhaps, to make progress. Here he will overshoot the mark and have to retrace his steps; there he will be unadventurous, and not go far enough. But progress in education, as in all other human affairs, has always been unsteady. It does not mean that it has not been sure.

REMEDIAL EXERCISES

By F. L. BILLOWS

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A GREAT many exercises fail in their purpose because they fail to engage or hold the attention of the pupil. Sentences not deve-

loped out of the situation and experience of the pupil do not exist for him, and therefore do not fulfil the first requirement of language, that it should move the mind to work in reference to perceived concepts. To give a sentence such as: "He is walking along the street" as an example, or as an item in an exercise, without specifying who is walking along the street is to trade in the husks of language, instead of in language itself; as if one were to try and study a snake by studying the skin it has cast. One can find out something about the snake, but nothing at all about its life or habits, and certainly no skill in dealing with live snakes can be learnt, from the empty skin. A sentence, to do its work effectively, in helping us to form significant language patterns in the mind, must refer to something or somebody, or to a situation which is either clearly before us or otherwise easily related to our experience; or else it must be possible for us to apprehend the circumstance referred to in the sentence by a small effort of the imagination. Sometimes a series of sentences which fulfil this last condition fails in another way by their being so little related to one another that they cancel one another out. As soon as the student has let the impression conveyed by the sentence form in his mind, another sentence about something quite different comes to blot out the impression. This may not matter once the sentence pattern has begun to form in the mind and the student has become interested in learning the pattern as a trick to use and only exercise is required, but this scattering of attention is fatal at the learning stage, because it almost inevitably leads to disengagement of the conscious part of the mind from the meaning of the sentence. For instance the following series of quite sensible sentences, taken from a book of exercises and suitable there, if the teacher realizes how to make use of them—as exercises of a pattern, once interest in learning the pattern has been aroused—cancel one another out and leave the mind blank, if they are used for teaching the pattern.

1. A child likes to play with a toy even if it is a cheap one.
2. The ass is a patient animal but the monkey is not.
3. This man and that woman teach the poor of the city.
4. The tax on the brush was very heavy.
5. My brother's mother-in-law has gone home.
6. The negro chief catches a goose, kills it and hangs it under the roof of his house.
7. The dentist extracts a bad tooth; he fills a hole in a tooth with metal.
8. The fat policeman runs after the thief; will he catch him?

Such sentences are just as unsuitable for the first stages of remedial work.

If a pupil has got as far as the college stage of his use of English and still produces sentences such as "He borned in Bandipur," or "He is lived in Bandipur," or "He was died in Bandipur," we not only have the problem of a set of broken or warped tools, but also the problem of a disengaged mind, and, as a result of both these conditions, we may expect, in addition, a problem of discouragement, of poor morale and apathy. The remedial work has no value, therefore, if it merely attempts to put the language right, presuming on an eagerness to repair the damage which is not unquestionably to be found in the majority of students. Remedial work must, therefore, be a morale-building and an interest-building enterprise. Use of the language which is not interesting and not related to the student's interests and needs is unlikely to be successful; equally, hours of work which are designed to remind the student of his inadequacy, and confront him with it in solitude, without human sympathy or co-operation to lighten the load, are likely to be unrewarding, and ultimately fruitless, unless the student has very compelling motives for wanting to improve his skill in the language. It is important for the teacher to realize that his most urgent task is to restore the confidence of his students, help them to realize what they know, and show them how a little effort may help them to help one another to transform a precariously grasped language form into a useful tool.

In taking a class for the first time the teacher must, therefore, go over all the language patterns that are presumed to have been learnt during the years of work that have so far been devoted to the language. The teacher must know what his class knows; but, still more important, the class must be shown what they know, and helped to see the potentialities of what they know for future development. The revision work must be systematic, therefore, to show the class clearly what they know and the relationships between the parts; it must be developed in such a way as to show the class what they can do with the language with only a little more practice. The class must then be shown how to carry on this practice in pairs and groups in such a way that they can feel confident of being able to achieve fluency and correctness by their own efforts. They must be shown how to achieve the human interchange, the reaction of person on person, that language normally provides the arena for. They must be helped to feel a development in growing skill and mastery. For this reason the teacher should not mind so much about correctness as about fluency. Fluency brings the feeling of mastery which gives the pupil the impression that he has a stake in the language, a sense of it belonging to him and being cultivable by his own efforts in co-operation with others. Fluency helps to provide the incentive to the pupil

to wish for correctness: too early and too strict an insistence on correctness dams up fluency and discourages the pupil, so that he no longer wishes or hopes for either correctness or fluency.

The teacher begins by working out a set of pattern sentences and writing them on the blackboard. He asks a number of students the same questions and gets them to write questions and answers on the blackboard, as they begin to take on a definite pattern. Suppose we take the first sentence which the teacher has found to be wrong in a conversation or composition "He borned in Bandipur." He would ask a boy "Where were you born, Narayanaswamy?" "I" begins the boy hesitantly "was born" continues the teacher "I was born in. . . ." and waits for the pupil to complete the answer: "I was born in Madras." He then repeats question and answer five or six times. He does this a few more times, helping each time as much as necessary with the answer, repeating it at first fairly frequently to make the pattern familiar. As more boys have answered correctly and others have become familiar with both forms from hearing them often repeated as genuine question and answer he may leave members of the class to ask the question until enough of them can ask the question and help hesitant students with their answers, to justify breaking up the class into groups for further practice in groups. Finally pairs can ask and answer the questions. But to avoid monotony and give the form of a genuine conversation about half a dozen questions and their answers should be worked out and written on the blackboard before the class is divided into pairs.

Where were you born?
I was born in Madras.
When were you born?
I was born in 1941.
How long ago were you born?
I was born seventeen years ago.
Were you born in a hospital or at home?
I was born in a hospital.
Where was your youngest brother born?
He was born at home.

Then the whole pattern can be repeated with some other suitable word such as vaccinated, but beginning with the questions: "Have you been vaccinated?" "Where were you last vaccinated?", etc. When several sequences of this kind have been evolved from the situation and experience of the pupils, and when they are beginning to recognize and respond correctly to the pattern, to feel that they are beginning to be able to manage it confidently and correctly, the teacher can set an exercise of the usual type in

which the sentences are assembled for their shape rather than their meaning. By this time the pupil should be interested in acquiring the shape as a handy and instinctive habit of expression.

Obviously this would involve the teacher in too much work if he were to do it all himself, so that he gets the groups into which his class is divided to work on the pattern as soon as he feels they can. He can also distribute a different word or phrase such as "vaccinated", "failed in your last exam"., "left out of the football team", "kept waiting for a bus", etc., to each group. When they have worked their sets of sentences out each group may choose a different past participle or phrase, and work out new sequences of question and answer to suit them and make good sense. Pairs may rehearse a sequence and perform it as a dramatized conversation in front of the class. As they get used to this way of working the teacher may leave more and more of the work to be done by groups under the leadership of the boys who catch the pattern quickest. He may give a little practice to them singly or in a special remedial group. As time goes by, and as the notion becomes familiar that remedial work is a matter for one boy or group of boys to help others or for pairs or groups to work together to help one another, and as the techniques of working in this way become easy and natural, the teacher may organize special groups for certain purposes, as a lifeboat crew of volunteers is organized to save shipwrecked seamen, or a mountain-rescue team to help people lost on the mountains. There may be a grammar-rescue team, equipped with suitable sequences of sentences and exercises, practised to the point of ease and fluency within the group and recorded in note-books, or indexed for ready reference from various books of exercises. There may be a phonetics-rescue service with fluency exercises. etc., ready for application, under the guidance of the teacher, to particular or common faults. There may also be spelling and punctuation rescue teams where they are needed, but perhaps more to sympathize with the labour of copying and exult warm-heartedly over success than to set or prescribe exercises, for good spelling depends on the pupil having copied a great many correctly spelt words in sentences that arrest and hold the attention, and these may as well do work in grammar at the same time.

The sentence to be manipulated, turned from positive to negative or active to passive, for words to be taken out and others substituted that call for a modification of the sentence or a change of tense, makes the best exercise for grammar, and also, because about 75 per cent of the sentence will be copied, the best practice in spelling. I have never known a class, that had enough copying of this sort to do from an early stage, to have any trouble

with spelling. At a late stage, when habits of spelling words wrong have been formed it is a little more difficult; but one way to help a bad speller is for a good speller to sit beside him and help him with the spelling of all doubtful words or help him look for them in the dictionary; between them they may form a list of all those words which the bad speller usually gets wrong. Keeping this list in front of them, they may be shown how to modify all the sentences which the bad speller copies from the blackboard so as to include the difficult words he usually spells wrong. For instance, suppose he spells "receive" wrong nine times out of ten; if the sentence: "I got a letter from my mother yesterday by the afternoon post," has been written on the blackboard for copying, he should either write down "I received a letter from my mother yesterday by the afternoon post," or he should write the modified sentence beside the first. In this, as in all other remedial work, the element of human sympathy and co-operation, team-work in which every member of the group has his significant part to play, of responsibility of the pupil for his own development, is what helps most to turn a habit of defeat into a habit of victory. The mistake must never be treated as though it were a moral failure, or a personal insult directed at the teacher, but as a minor accident that the student must be shown how to avoid repeating and given strength and confidence to attempt to cure. Mistakes must, as far as possible, be passed over and not have attention drawn to them, so that the pupil is helped to forget them. Certainly he should not be constantly reminded of them or warned of his tendency to make them, in advance. Above all, the teacher must put the responsibility for curing his mistakes on to the pupil, so that he is personally concerned in the process of replacing the incorrect form by a correct one. If a pupil frequently makes a particular mistake in spelling, the teacher should not tell him to write it out so many times, but ask him how many times he thinks he needs to write it to remember it, putting the responsibility on to him. If the mistake continues to be made the teacher can draw attention to it and discuss it and possible means of remedy, but on no account take away from the pupil his responsibility by scolding him or discourage him by falling into despair. The teacher is an adviser, calm and hopeful, encouraging and sympathetic; he cannot and should not take his pupils' mistakes on his conscience and suffer for them, or imagine that he can cure them as a doctor cures a patient; if he does, he weakens them and deprives them of their own healthy resourcefulness and initiative and of precious opportunities to grow and become mature. As a matter of fact, a doctor does not cure a patient, the good doctor tries to restore a sick body to a

state of balance by counteracting the poisons that are crippling it, and putting the body into a state in which its natural strength can re-assert itself and re-build the destroyed tissues, converting weakness into new strength. The teacher, in carrying out remedial work, should be very careful not to do more than he is obliged to do, calling out the strengths that are latent in his class, by giving them an opportunity to develop, in co-operation and cheerful team-work, resourcefulness, skill and confidence that will make the overcoming of habitual mistakes a responsibility to be shared within the class, yet individually faced, with the guidance and sympathy, but not the threats, or the enervating busy self-sacrifice, of the teacher.

THE HUMANITIES IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

BY K. G. SAIYIDAIN

Educational Adviser to the Government of India, Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, Publication No. 326, Albion Press, Delhi

WE should like to recommend to all teachers of language a booklet by K. G. Saiyidain, Educational Adviser to the Government of India, entitled "The Humanities in University Education". Although his words are particularly directed to university teachers, they apply as well to teachers in schools, to all teachers confronted with the task of training young people to explore the world and their own consciousnesses with the help of words, to relate themselves to knowledge and to employ words to digest it, manipulate it and store it. At a time when we are in danger of relying on material things, on economic progress, on redistribution of wealth, on fine houses, motor-cars and atomic power—all important in their place—or even to rely on and pride ourselves on our lack of them, he reminds us of the power of great literature to move and refine the mind, to induce growth and quicken the forces of life. He reminds us of the responsibility of the teacher to put his pupils in touch with the best minds that words can bring to them. He reminds us also that very often the hungry sheep look up to the shepherd and are not fed.

"If education fails to give the right orientation to our students towards the inner world of Man—his values and ideals, his attitudes and emotions, his sufferings and sacrifices, his triumphs and achievements as reflected in history and drama, and fiction and poetry and philosophy—it cannot shape their personality into a thing of beauty and balance. It will remain warped and torn by

conflicts and complexes, which have their origin primarily in the misdirection of emotion."

Later he writes :

"Literature and Art and Philosophy and Religion are the channels through which this realization can be quickened. I have deliberately said "can be quickened" because it is possible—in fact, it is usual—to teach them in such a dead, mechanical and unimaginative way that literature degenerates into technical exercises in grammar and language". . . . "What I am pleading for, therefore, is the teaching of Humanities as a living force which deepens and broadens the frontiers of experience and emotion."

It must be a great encouragement to all teachers working in India to know that in the very influential position of adviser on education to the Government of India, there is a man who sees so clearly the true nature of education and its potentialities. Let us close with a final quotation.

"The idea, however, is not to give encyclopaedic knowledge—which is impossible—but to open out windows in their minds, to quicken interest in many directions and thus to make sure that they will not live like bewildered or unconcerned strangers in their world."

QUESTION BOX

Question 1. I don't know exactly how to teach structures and teaching points for the higher forms, say for Form IV. I teach them a structure and give them as many examples as possible and ask them to give similar sentences and I ask them to repeat it. Thus I take at least forty minutes to teach them a single structure (a class of 30 pupils). If I go on in this rate I feel I shall not be able to finish the prescribed syllabus. What shall I do to gain time? Is the method adopted correct?

Answer. The way to introduce a structure in the 4th Form, as in any other Form, is to use it to speak about the situation in the class-room or the pupils' daily experience, getting them to join in the use of the new form before they have learnt it, by supplying them with as much of the answer as they need. This may be done at the beginning of a lesson which has been planned to teach the structure or it may have been introduced more gradually over a long period. If the structure is a general one which can be used a great deal, once it has been introduced,

and is easy to apply, we may devote a lesson to introducing it and consider one lesson a very short time for introducing and familiarizing an important language habit. As an example of the first I will take conditions, as shown in Structure 1. of the Fourth Year in my Guide Book. First of all they have been prepared for by the teaching of "wishes" at the end of the Third Year, so that the usage of an apparent past tense to speak about what is not taking place, in contrast to what is taking place, has become familiar. We can ask: "How many boys are there in this class?" "There are 43." "Are all the seats occupied?" "No, they are not." "Which seats are not occupied?" "Those are not," or "The ones in the front row are not." "How many seats are not occupied?" "Five seats are not occupied." "How many boys would there be in class, if all the seats were occupied?" "43+5; there would be 48." Provided the teacher keeps his attention on the facts of the class-room, explains nothing, gives the meanings of no words, but asks this set of questions, or similar ones, in such a way that his pointing finger or gesture gives the answer that is understood, and his words the answer that has to be spoken, he will find that the words are soon taken up; boys can be called out to ask the questions and to frame questions about other facts on the same pattern; the teacher gradually increases the proportion of conditional sentences to normal ones to give the contrast; he will be surprised how soon the pattern has begun to be grasped fully. Then the sequence of questions and answers can be written on the blackboard, to be copied into note-books and adapted by each member of the class to fit his own personal experience. This can be done in class and repeated for homework. A point to notice is that if the word "occupied" was not known at the beginning of the lesson it would certainly be known by the end, and this without its meaning having been explained, or any time having been devoted to it exclusively.

Question 2. I find the method very useful in teaching poetry. The pupils enjoy my poetry classes, they learn them more easily, they are even able to repeat the poems in a very short time. But there is one doubt, i.e.,

in most of the poems, we get English scenes. They are not able to understand them even though I draw them on the board. They may understand but I don't think they get a good picture of it. How can I make them understand them?

Answer. It is not very important that Indian pupils should get an exact picture of English scenes. Unless they have been to England their imagined picture will, in any case, be a modification of the Indian scene, though we can help them through pictures. It is important that they should have an imaginative experience of the poem, so that their own insight and view of life is added to and fructified.

Question 3. I feel the failure in the case of teaching Composition. If I ask them to write a letter to a friend or to their mothers they are not able to write a single sentence correctly. Is it necessary to give them picture composition and then proceed to others?

Answer. No independent composition should be given to any pupils who make many mistakes. They must spend a great deal of time on composition exercises —sentences that give practice in the forms which they need for composition writing—until they can be relied upon to write most of their sentences correctly. We can help them to learn to correct one another's sentences by getting them to produce one agreed version in each group of four or five pupils. Each member of the group writes down the agreed version, and they are passed round the group to ensure that they are all the same, but only one copy is handed in from each group. In this way they learn to look at their work critically and avoid mistakes and also the burden of correction is very much reduced for the teacher. All written composition should be prepared for by discussion of the subject in class; to give a class confidence in beginning continuous composition, the first paragraph may be written on the blackboard from sentences contributed by the class, the second paragraph may be done in groups and a third paragraph may be written by individuals separately.

Question 4. In the case of teaching prose and non-detailed texts, is it necessary that I should ask them to read every lesson aloud or is it enough if I ask them to read

them silently after I read the passage once or twice to them.

Answer. It is not necessary for every member of the class to read the whole of every lesson aloud. When they have heard the most important words and sentence patterns repeated in the preliminary discussion of the subject that precedes the reading and have begun to use them themselves, tentatively; when they have heard the teacher read it right through once or twice and heard him read and comment on the separate paragraphs several times over, they should be asked to read the piece through silently several times before it is read aloud. When it is read aloud for the first time it is best to ask each pupil to read only one or two sentences, and to insist on fluency in reading even if the sentences have to be repeated several times to get them fluent, the teacher helping, where necessary, by repeating each sentence several times to make it familiar and easy on the tongue. In this way the maximum number of pupils have a chance to be trained in fluency and pronunciation and to participate mentally in the training of others. The length of passages read by each pupil can be increased progressively in subsequent readings. After this the piece need not be read aloud again, but should, if there is time, be read over again and again silently. Non-detailed texts should normally be read at home and only talked about in class.

Question 5. There is one argument going on here about the right moment to teach, "There are several men *carrying* vegetables on their heads," "He sat *talking* to his friend."

Answer. Provided this type of participial phrase is used naturally in a class-room situation it can be introduced quite well in the first year with a good class or in the second year with a slow one in this sort of way:

The teacher asks, "Which boys are wearing blue shirts?" They are rapidly identified by the class and the teacher asks, "How many boys are wearing blue shirts?"—and repeats the question as often as is necessary to various boys to establish the pattern "wearing blue shirts." He then says, "The boys wearing blue shirts stand up," and motions to them

to stand if they fail to understand. He then asks the question, "Which boys are standing?" and provides the answer, "The boys wearing blue shirts are standing." He asks as many boys the question as is necessary to get an immediate answer. He then repeats it with other colours of shirts until the pattern is established.

This can easily be done in the first year but the teacher may feel he has more important things to deal with first.

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